

(No. 891.)

"BELLA TUMILTY."

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at St. George's Hall, Liverpool, on the 8th and 9th days of February 1881, before THOS. STAMFORD RAFFLES, Esq., Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Rear-Admiral APLIN, and Captains FORSTER and COMYN, Nautical Assessors, into the circumstances attending the loss, through stranding, of the British sailing ship "BELLA TUMILTY," of Barrow, on Los Roques, Coast of Venezuela, on the 17th November last, whereby loss of life ensued.

*Report of Court.*

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances attending the above-mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons stated in the annex hereto, that the said ship was stranded and lost, owing to the master, Mr. J. E. Evans, having been misled by the lighthouse on Los Roques having been incorrectly placed on the chart by which he was navigating his vessel.

Dated this 9th day of February 1881.

(Signed) T. S. RAFFLES,  
Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) ELPHINSTONE APLIN, }  
Rear-Admiral, } Assessors.  
GEORGE H. FORSTER, }  
D. H. COMYN, }

*Annex to the Report.*

The "Bella Tumilty" was a barquentine, built of wood, at Berwick upon Tweed in 1872, and registered at Barrow in Furness of 190·19 tons, and she was owned by Mr. Joseph Fisher and another of that place. She left Swansea on the 29th September 1880, under the command of Mr. John Elias Evans, who held a certificate of competency as master, No. 82,914, and with a crew of 8 hands all told. She had a cargo of 250 tons of coke and patent fuel, and was bound for Tucacas, in Venezuela. She drew, on leaving port, 10 feet 6 inches forward and 11 feet 1 inch aft, and was lightly laden, and the ship was in every way in good condition. The vessel made a prosperous voyage up to the 17th November, on which day, about 5.45 p.m., they sighted Orchila Island on the port bow, bearing S.E.  $\frac{1}{2}$  E., distant about 10 miles, the ship being then under all plain sail, steering S., the wind being N.E., and the ship going seven knots. At 6.15 p.m., the lighthouse on one of the Islands of Los Roques was seen on the starboard hand, at which time they had lost sight of Orchila Island. The master determined to go through the channel between Los Roques and Orchila, and the mate then took a bearing of the lighthouse, which was either W. by S. S., or W.S.W. S., and having estimated the bearing of Orchila at that time, they considered they were about in mid channel and altered the ship's course to S.S.W. At 7 the light was seen on Los Roques on the starboard beam bearing from W. to W. by N. The master then went below to consult his chart, and on returning on deck he said that to keep her S.W. would take her 10 miles clear of any danger, and the course was then altered to S.W. The weather was then dark and rainy. Sail was reduced to square sails and mainsail, the ship going about eight knots, the wind being dead aft. At 8 p.m., on the mate leaving deck, the light bore N.W. on the starboard beam, and he reported it to the master, who said they were 10 miles clear of all danger. They could see no land. The master then took charge of the deck. In about 10 minutes the mate thought he heard a squall and rushed on deck, when he saw breakers under the starboard bow. The master, who was then forward, ordered the helm hard a starboard, but the

vessel never answered the helm and struck heavily, remaining fast. Sails were furled, the wind being right aft, and an attempt was made to get out a stream anchor and kedges, but the sea was too high. On sounding there was no water found in her, but before midnight there were 17 inches in her, and she soon after bilged, and on the following morning fell over to seaward, carrying away her bulwarks. The long boat was ordered out at 6 a.m., and the mate, and boatswain, and a seaman and boy were ordered to go in her, with a barrel of bread and some water, which they landed leaving the boy in charge. They then attempted to return to the ship, but could not get within 40 yards of her owing to the swell and shallow water. Assistance then came from the lighthouse, and a coloured man swam off and got a line from the ship which he took ashore and made fast to a rock, by which means the three men left on board with the master were saved. He was unfortunately drowned. He was last seen about two minutes before the line was made fast, standing amidships, and must have been washed overboard by one of the seas breaking over the vessel, but he was not seen by any one to disappear. His body was found about half an hour subsequently, on the edge of the reef. The vessel became a total wreck.

On the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Paxton for the Board of Trade put the following questions to the Court:—

1. What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?
2. Was the vessel, when she left Swansea, provided with proper and sufficient charts for the voyage?
3. Was the master justified in taking his vessel through the channel between Orchila and Los Roques at night, and with the charts he had on board?
4. Were the cross bearings taken by the mate at 6 p.m. correct?
5. Was the lighthouse on Los Roques accurately laid down on the chart by which the vessel was navigated; and, if not, was the master deceived by the inaccuracy?
6. Was the master justified in altering the course at or shortly before 8 p.m. to S.W.?
7. Was a good look-out kept?
8. What was the cause of the master's death?

The Court, in giving judgment, in reply to the first question, said:—That this vessel was stranded owing to the master having been misled by his chart as to the position of the lighthouse on one of the group of Los Roques.

The reply to the 2nd question involved the necessity of entering into some detail in regard to the chart by which the master navigated his vessel, and other charts and books of sailing directions referring to this quarter of the globe. The master seemed to have navigated his vessel by Laurie's General Chart of the West Indies and Gulf of Mexico (dated 1878), and on that chart the light on Los Roques is placed on the S.E. point of Cayo Grande, the most southern of the group; and believing, doubtless, that the light was correctly shewn on the chart, the master shaped a course calculated to take him well clear of the islands. In point of fact the light is really 12 to 15 miles further to N.W., and not on the Cayo Grande at all, but on the island of El Roque, the most northerly of the group. On the Admiralty charts of these islands, from 1876 to the present date, the light is correctly shewn. But it is to be observed that in the West Indian Pilot, Part 1, "Published for the Hydrographic Office, Admiralty," and on the title page giving "1880" as the date of publication, though in the advertisement immediately following, dated "March 1872," the book is stated to have been revised to that date only, the notice of this light is as follows, on page 142, and there is no other:— "Lighthouse.—The Venezuelan Government intends to erect a lighthouse, 200 feet high, on the S.E. point of Grande Cay, to be finished in 1875;" and the source from which this information was obtained may probably have also misled the publishers of Laurie's charts in so placing it. But be that as it may, there was certainly reasonable ground for the conclusion of the master of the "Bella Tumilty," that he was taking a safe course in the navigation of his vessel with the information which he appeared to have possessed.

In answer to the 3rd question, the Court was of opinion that the master was justified in taking the

course he did between the islands, had the light been, as he had reason to suppose, on the S.E. end of Cayo Grande.

In answer to the 4th question, the bearings taken by the mate at 6.15 p.m. were not cross bearings, but the bearing of the lighthouse, and the *estimated* bearing of Orchila Island appeared to have been correctly taken.

The 5th question has been answered in the judgment of the Court on the 1st and 2nd questions.

As to the 6th question, the master was justified in altering his course at 8 p.m. had the position of the light, as shewn by his chart, been correct.

As to the 7th question, a good look-out seemed to have been kept.

In reply to the 8th and last question, the Court concluded from the evidence that the master was washed

overboard and drowned as the sea was breaking violently over the vessel while he was superintending the getting of a rope on shore, by means of which the three men remaining on board were saved.

In concluding their report, the Court felt bound to remark upon the fact, which has frequently been commented on by previous courts of inquiry, that vessels to sea from time to time very imperfectly furnished with the charts necessary for safe navigation. In the case the master had only a general chart, and a gentleman from the office of the publishers of that chart stated—and in the statement the assessors fully concurred—that the information given by a general chart is insufficient for safe navigation; and charts on a large scale of the places to which they are bound should, in the opinion of the Court, be supplied to masters of vessels.

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